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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001482

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR D, SA, SA/INS, EUR/NB, EUR/WE
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [CE](#) [FR](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Peace Process update: In Paris, Tigers say they aim for talks; President urges action on camp

Refs: Colombo 1466, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Charge'
d'Affaires. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

11. (C) This update of Sri Lanka's peace process reviews the following:

>> On margins of ongoing meeting in Paris, Tiger official says group aims to restart talks

>> President Kumaratunga demands that GSL take steps against unauthorized Tiger camp in east

>> Tensions in east between Muslims and the Tigers continue to percolate

>> The flavor of the Peace Process: Latest poll shows support for peace process higher than ever

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Mainly Positive Vibes from Tigers in Paris
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12. (SBU) The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) meeting in Paris, which began on August 21, is continuing. Few details are emerging from the closed door meeting, which involves high-level LTTE officials and Tamil supporters of the group from outside of Sri Lanka. On the margins of the meeting, however, Tiger officials have been making mainly upbeat comments to the press. S.P. Thamilchelvam, the leader of the LTTE delegation and the group's political wing chief, for example, was quoted as stating: "We want to resume the peace talks; it is on that basis that we are meeting in Paris." (Note: The Tigers withdrew from the talks with the Sri Lankan government in April.) Thamilchelvam went on to say that the meeting's participants were closely reviewing the government's July proposal for creating an interim structure in the north/east. The GSL's proposal was "ambiguous," he said, and the group was developing counter-proposals to present to the government. He did not provide any details regarding the nature of the counter-proposals, however.

13. (C) COMMENT: At this point, the meeting in Paris appears to be proceeding in as positive a direction for the peace track as might be hoped. Thamilchelvam and the rest of his LTTE team, for example, are being very careful with their words, and seem to want to smooth things out and not inflame matters with the government. That said, tentative indications are that the LTTE's counter-proposals could well be stiff ones, with the group pressing for maximum power in the north/east. The planned presence at the Paris meeting of Norwegian Special Envoy Erik Solheim later this week will hopefully convince participants to endorse realistic counter-proposals, not ones too onerous for the GSL to consider. END COMMENT.

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Kumaratunga Demands Action on LTTE Camp
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14. (SBU) President Kumaratunga has entered the fray over the LTTE's unauthorized military camp in the east. In an August 21 letter to Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, which her office subsequently made public, the president demanded that the government take "action" against the LTTE's "Wan Ela" camp, which the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) ruled in July violated the February 2002 ceasefire accord. In her letter, Kumaratunga did not specify exactly what the government should do about the camp except to state "the authority of the government should be exercised immediately to have the camp withdrawn." The president's letter also criticizes what she characterizes as the SLMM's "limited" enforcement ability and the "heavily flawed" ceasefire agreement. It is not known whether the prime minister has responded to the president's letter as of yet.

15. (C) COMMENT: The president and her advisers have been somewhat feisty of late regarding the peace process, as if they believe the government is newly vulnerable on that score. The Tigers' refusal to vacate the Wan Ela camp, their assassination of opponents, and their violent attacks on Muslims in the east have probably raised public skepticism to some extent (see below re latest polling), but the acerbic tone the president has used in making her criticisms, and the fact that the government has basically chosen to ignore her, are almost certainly not helping improve stressful cohabitation ties. END COMMENT.
Tensions Continue to Percolate in the East
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16. (SBU) There continues to be a haze of tension over the east following the murders of four Muslims last week, presumably at the hands of Tiger hitmen (see Reftels). Security has been stepped up, with military and police increasing their patrols in the region. Despite the enhanced security presence, Muslims and the LTTE remain at each other's throats, with four Tamil youths abducted in the town of Ampara on August 23, while two Muslims from Batticaloa remain unaccounted for and are presumed to have been kidnapped by the Tigers. In the meantime, a hartal (work stoppage) was observed by Tamils on August 25 in Trincomalee area. No violence was reported.

17. (C) COMMENT: LTTE-Muslim relations in the east are always tense and are going through one of their periodic bad patches right now. Under fierce criticism from Muslim politicians, who are clearly getting increasingly exasperated, the government appears to be doing its best to clamp down, but it has shown little inclination to take on the LTTE. In the meantime, although it is unconfirmed, there are continued reports that small knots of Muslims are banding together to take on the LTTE. Given the effectiveness of LTTE forces, this effort is unlikely to succeed, but Sri Lanka could be in for a spike in Muslim extremism. END COMMENT.

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18. (C) In our "flavor of the peace process" section, Sri Lankans have given the 20-month old peace process the highest vote of confidence yet in a recent poll. Conducted in May by the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA), a well-respected local think-tank, the poll reports that 87.4 percent of Sri Lankans believe that face-to-face talks between the government and the LTTE are the best way to bring peace to the country. This seeming endorsement of the GSL's peace track flags a steady upward trend, improving on 80 percent support at the beginning of the peace process in December 2001 and 83 percent approval six months ago. Assessing the numbers along ethnic lines, the CPA poll showed a greater than 85 percent support from each of the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim communities. The poll also revealed high approval for the Norwegian government's peace facilitation effort.

19. (C) COMMENT: Despite ups-and-downs in the process and the occasional hot criticism from the opposition, the government's efforts for peace with the LTTE have seemed to be buoyed all along by strong public support. The CPA poll results appear to underscore the depth and breadth of such support. There is considerable lag time in gathering poll results in Sri Lanka, however, and much water has passed under the bridge since May. Some of the news since that timeframe -- such as the Tokyo donors conference -- has no doubt served to reinforce support for the peace track. That said, the intensification of the LTTE's aggressive tactics in recent weeks may have added a degree of skepticism. END COMMENT.

110. (U) Minimize considered.

ENTWISTLE